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RRI Condemns the Murder of Indra Pelani, Land Rights Activist Beaten to Death by Guards Contracted to Asia Pulp and Paper (APP)

Washington, DC (March 4, 2015) -- The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) Coalition joins local and international NGOs in condemning last Friday's killing of a local farmer and land rights defender in Jambi, Indonesia. While traveling to a harvest festival, Indra Pelani was allegedly [murdered](#) after an argument with guards stationed outside a pulpwood plantation owned by PT Wira Karya Sakti (WKS), a subsidiary of Asia Pulp and Paper (APP). According to reports, Pelani's body was later found tied up several kilometers away, showing evidence of stab wounds and severe beating. The seven guards suspected in the killing [surrendered to police](#) on Wednesday.

"This appears to be a pre-meditated, brutal murder," said Riko Kurniawan, Executive Director of Walhi Riau, member of a coalition of local environmental organizations in Sumatra. Pelani's community had been engaged in a [decade-long conflict](#) with WKS over the ownership of 2,000 hectares of farmland. "We hope that justice is done this time," [Kurniawan added](#), "unlike 2010 and 2012 cases in which two farmers were killed under similar circumstances arising from social conflicts with APP suppliers in Jambi and Riau."

In a statement, APP pledged assistance to the investigation, saying that it has "required PT Wira Karya Sakti to suspend all of the personnel alleged to be involved in the incident including security officers, the commander of the District Eight security team and the head of security at contractor PT MCP."

This murder comes on the heels of APP's recent efforts to reverse its reputation as one of the world's [most notorious tropical deforesters](#). APP first issued its zero-deforestation Forest Conservation Policy [in 2013](#), and reaffirmed this commitment last September, when [the company signed](#) the New York Declaration on Forests, a pledge from companies, governments, and NGOs to cut deforestation in half by 2020.

Last year, company officials fully cooperated with researchers during a joint RRI-Landesia [investigation into the illegality](#) of the company's forest land acquisitions in China. Following the release of the report, APP said that it welcomed "feedback from stakeholders everywhere," and that it was implementing an internal action plan to address its numerous violations of Chinese law. To date, however, there is little indication that APP has made efforts to remedy past land grabs in China or elsewhere. A [recent evaluation](#) of APP's social responsibility performance in Indonesia revealed a troubling lack of progress, particularly in regards to resolving community conflicts with the company's suppliers.

Friday's horrific events prove that promises alone are far from adequate when it comes to protecting the rights and lives of forest communities. As Mina Setra of the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) in Indonesia said at a [land rights conference](#) in February: "Zero deforestation commitments have to come along with zero evictions, zero criminalizations, and zero killings. We cannot start talking about stopping deforestation while we keep killing the people who are actually doing it on the ground."



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As resource conflicts intensify around the globe, a growing number of environmental and land rights activists are paying with their lives—since 2001, [900 activists have been killed](#), triple the number from the previous decade.

“APP must realize that it cannot build an empire on the dead bodies of activists,” said Arvind Khare, Executive Director of RRI. “We urge APP to carry through with its promise to assist the investigation, and hope that it will make preventing evictions, murders, and human rights abuses a cornerstone of all future work in Indonesia.”

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Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) is a global coalition of 14 Partners and over 150 international, regional and community organizations advancing forest tenure, policy and market reforms. RRI leverages the strategic collaboration and investment of its Partners and Collaborators around the world by working together on research, advocacy, and convening strategic actors to catalyze change on the ground. RRI is coordinated by the Rights and Resources Group, a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC. For more information, visit www.rightsandresources.org.